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## ART. XII. — CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *Almost a Heroine*. By the Author of "Charles Auchester," "Counterparts," etc., etc. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1859.

THIS work, appearing soon after "Counterparts," by the same author, has some resemblance to it in its general style, and in its portraiture of character. In both the predominant idea is "temperament," and in both the sensuous and super-sensuous are strangely intermingled. In the endeavor to paint exceptional natures, the author too often enters into the unnatural and the absurd, till the characters become mere intangible phantoms, quite remote from our human sympathies. Some of them, to be sure, are very pretty phantoms, and draw man to the earth for a moment in some charming gush of natural expression; but just as the heart is warming toward them, they wing their way back to the cold, upper air. As a whole, the book is no more like a record of actual life than the atmosphere of a conservatory, laden with orange-blossoms and heavy with heliotrope, is like the fresh breeze which comes to us over the wide-spreading fields. Yet the practical details which recur at intervals are of so decided a nature as to forbid us to regard the story as an intentional and thorough abstraction, and it cannot therefore be judged entirely as a rhapsody.

In the theories with which all of the author's works abound, there are glimpses of grand realities, and approaches toward comprehensive truths; but though their suggestions are tempting, their exposition is neither clear nor helpful. We remain still in a twilight region of obscurity, seeking in vain for an outlet. The writer is very skilful in the use of words, very happy in the choice of epithets; but the plumage sometimes degenerates into affectation, and produces paragraphs of ornamental nonsense. The style is in itself sufficiently fanciful and arabesque, and but slight exaggeration is needed to make it transcend the limits of sense.

One attribute of a novelist is quite indispensable to the truth of his work; he must make his characters appear to the reader what he asserts them to be. It is of no use for him to call a man a hero, if he invest him with no heroic gifts. The development of the story must unfold the promised characteristics. Words do not make passion, unless the very breath of life is breathed into them. Now we think few readers can fail to see that, in spite of the author's frequent assertion of the passionate sensitiveness of Arnold Major and Horatia Standish, they are really hard, unimpressible people. Ernesto is almost an im-

personality ; Erselie is quite “without form and void.” John, were he possible, would be interesting as a specimen of moral amphibiousness, but a very “uncanny” servant about one’s house. The apparent change in the author’s plan, which breaks the unity of the plot, allows the introduction of the idea of renunciation, which is so prominent both in “Charles Auchester” and in “Counterparts.” In each of the three works we have the spectacle of an absorbing and passionate love laid aside by an effort of volition. The author has a woman’s enjoyment of details, and some of the descriptions of scenery, and even of houses and furniture, are very successful. The picture is painted for us in living colors. There is evidence of reserved power in this last work, in the fact that, in spite of its incongruities, it has nerve and vitality enough to insure decided interest in the reader, and to individualize its impression on the mind. Also, it is something in these days of many books, to attain to a style of one’s own, and to possess peculiarities which awaken the attention without too severely shocking the principles of the reader.

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- 2.—1. *Sword and Gown*. By the Author of “Guy Livingstone.” Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1859. pp. 308.  
2. *Library of Select Novels*. No. 213. *Sword and Gown*. New York: Harper and Brothers. 1859. pp. 67.

THE title of this romance appears at first glance merely epigrammatical. Viewed in the light of the discourse to which it is the text, however, it assumes the aspect of an insolent antithesis. The Sword, though by no means a Damascus blade, cuts into useless rags the Gown, which covers a poor and cowardly heart. Neither the soldier nor the priest has the ring of true metal, and the contrast between them is without dignity. The author looks at life from a very low stand-point, and attributes to his characters the most selfish and unworthy motives. They all walk in paths on which no heavenly sunshine smiles, and grovel hopelessly in the mire of their own passions. We protest against a hero and heroine such as Royston Keene and Cecil Tresilyan. They are of the coarsest clay, and all the adventitious circumstances with which they are surrounded fail to blind us to their really ignoble natures. The charms of moral beauty, the dignity of self-denial, the power of discipline, have no place in our author’s thought. Yet with this heavy drawback and abatement, the story manifests, like its predecessor, a very high order of ability in style, in the arrangement of incidents, and in the delineation of character.